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FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0868
INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 9142
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 7388
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 5262
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 3540
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 5199
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 0067
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM PRIORITY 0734
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 4316
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 9703
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 6994
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO PRIORITY 0055
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 3870
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001094

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INSB

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/02/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [PTER](#) [EAID](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: SHOW ME THE MONEY: KEY TAMIL LEADER DELAYS
ENDORSEMENT IN PRESIDENTIAL RACE

REF: A. COLiance (TNA) leader R. Sampanthan stated that horsing a candidate in the upcoming presidential election. Sampanthan noted that he recognized the leverage the Tamil community increasingly held as a possible kingmaker in the election and he wanted to extract as many concessions as possible from General Sarath Fonseka and President Mahinda Rajapaksa before he committed his support to either candidate. The Tamil leader also noted his concern about a credible election and the involvement of the military in the election process. END SUMMARY.

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In No Hurry to Make a Decision

¶2. (C) In a 1 December meeting with the Charge and the Polcouns, TNA leader R. Sampanthan noted that he will delay his endorsement of either General Fonseka or President Rajapaksa in the January 26 presidential election. Sampanthan assessed that the political environment had changed significantly in the past couple of months in Sri Lanka and that the Tamil vote had become much more important. Sampanthan divulged that many within the Tamil community had asked him to run as an independent candidate, but he assessed that it made no sense for him to win "a couple of hundred thousand votes and lose."

Ready to Exploit Emerging Leverage

¶3. (C) Alternatively, Sampanthan opined that the best scenario for the Tamil community would be to extract concessions from the presidential candidates and have the international and domestic communities hold the candidates to their promises after the election. The Tamil leader noted that he would use a December 2 meeting with Rajapaksa and an upcoming meeting with Fonseka to gauge their level of commitment to the Tamil community. In particular, Sampanthan

opined that he was looking for the manner in which each candidate would make promises to the Tamil community; he noted that he would be looking for a public declaration of commitment to the Tamils, or at a minimum, campaign promises that the candidates could be held to account for by "key countries" within the diplomatic community.

¶4. (C) Sampanthan noted that he would tell President Rajapaksa in his meeting that he had not accomplished anything for the Tamils in his first term and that he would have to make a strong statement on what he hoped to accomplish in his second term. Turning to Fonseka, Sampanthan stated that he thought Fonseka's initial public statements and press conference were encouraging, but that the former General had a lot of questions ned About Upcoming Election

¶5. (C) The Tamil leader noted that he was worried about pre-election violence and that he was especially concerned

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about the military's role during the campaign period. Sampanthan noted that he was especially disturbed by reports he had heard that Army officers were taking leave from their jobs and joining the campaign. Furthermore, Sampanthan opined that he was worried about the prospect of military personnel loyal to Rajapaksa and Fonseka clashing and attempting to influence the electoral process.

Switzerland Conference a Success

¶6. (C) When queried about the recent meeting of key Tamil and Muslim leaders in Zurich, Sampanthan noted that he was happy with the progress that had been made in Switzerland. He stated that a consensus had emerged that minority leaders need to forge greater unity to have an impact on the political process. While Sampanthan acknowledged that certain minority individuals would continue to support the Rajapaksa government, he opined that the majority of minority leaders ultimately would speak with one voice.

Comment

¶7. (C) Sampanthan was extremely relaxed and appeared confident about his political position. He repeatedly stated that he had no intention of making a quick endorsement and that Fonseka and Rajapaksa would have to earn the Tamil vote. Possibly as a reflection of his confidence, Sampanthan agreed to bring up the Tissainayagam case during his meeting with President Rajapaksa. On December 2, Sampanthan called the front office to confirm that he had raised the issue, and that the President had said he would contact the Attorney General on the matter, noting that the AG needed to consent in order for bail to be granted. Post will report ongoing contact with key Tamil leaders.

FOWLER